

Saddam Hussein

The Fighter, the Thinker and the Man

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Part II Chapter 7

The role of the party supersedes the technocrats

Having reached this point in the thoughts of Saddam Hussein there are a number of important questions, some purely theoretical and others more practical, which must be asked. For instance, can economic growth of the type referred to lead to the creation of socialism? What guarantee is there that it will not go the same way as other experiments in the developing world, also carried out under the banner of socialism, and turn into state capitalism? Looking back at his ideas about the developmental process and the way it should be applied in Iraq, what in Saddam Hussein's opinion is the role of the Iraqi masses? And how is this role represented? What guarantee is there that it will continue, not only amongst the masses, but also amongst the leaders themselves, who may be goaded by success in "battle" imagine that they have won the "war", and consequently make light of the role of the masses, or ultimately do away with it altogether?

Saddam Hussein first of all says: "Not all development is a step along the road to socialism in any country or regime. There has been development in Europe, America, Japan and other countries, but it has not resulted in socialism. The activities of the state in these places have been no more than a form of state capitalism, which is part of the general process of building capitalism. In such instances, the state with its authority is rather ensuring that the capitalist system is maintained (1)." But on the other hand: "Without development, the creation of a flourishing social system which can serve as a model in this area of which we are part, and which can increase the people's well being and provide the where-withal to defend itself and its principles, is unimaginable. Similarly, development in our country cannot but accurately express the socialist roots of the system with its related programmes, to which again it is inescapably linked.

There is therefore a close relationship between this and the principal guidelines of our party in both social and economic fields (2)."

An important conversation held during the meeting between Saddam Hussein and Fidel Castro on the morning of December 15th, 1978, which was also attended by a number of those behind the Cuban revolution, serves to confirm the above and is reproduced here in part:

CASTRO: You are certainly wise in saying that we should gain time, because time works in the interests of revolution. Iraq can advance politically, socially, economically and militarily. The uneducated gained

the first victory for the Cuban army, and we are now summoning the army's middle ranks, and so we are better trained and prepared. They are more skilled in the use of arms. In the case of Iraq, time is working in your favour, because you're developing the whole country and rallying the masses, which they didn't do in Egypt.

SADDAM HUSSEIN: There was no revolutionary party and no one apart from Abdul Nasser. He was a revolutionary, but in different circumstances to yours. You made sure of having revolutionaries before assuming power and he didn't. In Iraq we also made sure we had revolutionaries before taking control. The party made sacrifices and there were martyrs and those who suffered prison and torture; but this had to be done in order to create revolutionaries who knew how to keep the revolution going and benefit the people. That's why we weren't worried. Our worry was how to develop our programmes faster, and what methods we should choose for applying socialism, as well as how, in three years, we could wipe out the illiteracy affecting a sixth of the population. Now we have one and a quarter million enrolled in literacy centres.

CASTRO: Despite the difficulties we are optimistic.

SADDAM HUSSEIN: Certainly, otherwise we wouldn't be revolutionaries. The people work with goodwill, and whatever the imperialists have gained they will never be able to make an accurate estimate of the people's strength.

They aren't experts in this field. They only knew how to exploit and carry out undercover work; but as to how the people are able to act in its own interest, experience has always shown us that they miscalculate (3).

In this meeting with one of the most important socialist (Marxist) leaders in the world, the role of revolutionary power, of the revolutionary party, and of the rallying of the masses was confirmed. An obvious comparison was also made between the Nasserite experience on the one hand and the Cuban and Iraqi experience on the other. However, neither Castro nor Saddam Hussein attributed the reason for the first's disastrous end to the neglect to create a revolutionary party and rally together the masses.

Instead they merely said that Abdul-Nasser failed to ensure that there were revolutionaries like himself before he took power, and to form a revolutionary party after. Saddam Hussein expresses the same ideas elsewhere:

"So that ideas can be applied and then take root and build tradition, they must be expressed in a practical form. If they remain in mere book form any counter operation is made simple, and any person who takes power into his hands can return the book to the library, as it were, thereby destroying or weakening any counter influence (4).

Even so, the question still remains. Is it not possible for a party in power to be so proud of its victories and so conceited about its achievements that

it relaxes its muscles, its arteries harden, and the blood in its veins solidifies? In many instances throughout the world there have been parties, which, before they assumed power, were ablaze with revolution. Then no sooner had they gained power than their flames died and their revolutionary spirit grew cold, becoming nothing more than a set of archives which the new bureaucrats take out of their drawers to look at like an old photograph album, or something which is spoken about on national occasions and official feast days.

That Saddam Hussein is fully aware of this is evident, not only from the active days of his youth, but also from the long hard struggle he waged within the party ranks before it took power, and after as its head. He did not acquire the seat of power by design as, for him, to rule was not an aim in itself. On the contrary, he asked more than once to be relieved from top executive positions to retain only his position as an active member within the party ranks. This, however, he only did after the revolution was purged of saboteurs on July 30th, 1968, for the first time, although not for the last. When preparations for the revolution were being made, he told his colleagues that once they had assumed power he only wanted to be considered as an ordinary member of the party. Naturally, they refused his request, which in any case was not viable at the time; but after July 30th, 1968, knowing that the party was assured of full control, he told President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr following the declaration that his former wish could now be carried out. But al-Bakr and his fellow leaders again refused his wish, this time even more decisively, but he continued to feel the same, even after spending many years as Vice-Chairman of the Revolution Command Council. From time to time he still now experiences similar feelings, but he can no longer escape from his major responsibility towards his people and the countries of the world as leader of the country.

Indeed, this true party member is not forgotten, nor does he forget his party, for an instant. As far as he is concerned, the state is the instrument by which to administer the revolution, and it is therefore no surprise that he should constantly urge his colleagues to transfer the party traditions to the state:

"Colleagues, in your task of leading the country you would do well to seek guidance from the party traditions.

They should provide a firm base for your daily work and serve a practical use within the advanced state as need wants. Do not attempt to borrow the state's traditions and substitute them for those of the party, because there is a great qualitative difference between the political and systematic construction of the state and that of the party, even though the state itself is the party's. If there were no difference between the power of the state and the party, the party would become the party of power instead of the

power remaining the power of the party. In this case, we would lose the quality we have of fighting to affect the good of society by a qualitative change for the better.

Alternatively, we would be seriously weakened, and the party would become a conventional tool of the state. The state itself would no longer remain a non-static entity always led by the party in the interests of progress (5)."

Saddam Hussein also recognizes that criticism and self-criticism are vital, and asserts to his party colleagues "we must not stray from the open criticism to be found in democracies "(6). But does criticism for pure criticism's sake mean that the leadership is democratic?

Indeed not. " At the same time, we must not allow mistaken ideas to go by without being pointed out and resolutely dealt with. This is because there are renegades hidden amongst us, or within Iraqi society and the state organizations, and these remain strong because they are present, intellectually and psychologically, in each state sector and emerge in different forms according to circumstances (7)." Beware of renegades is what he always tells them, not because he suspects that his people will rule with an iron hand, but because he knows that the enemies of any true revolution are many, both at home and abroad. He therefore constantly reminds his colleagues to keep their wits about them and not automatically assume there will be none. In his view, this requires a firm supervision of ideas from the top, as well as which the invulnerability of principles should be strengthened.

"We should not disregard our role in supervising the internal life of both party and state, just as we should neither ignore to have supervision by the masses of the state organizations, and even of the small pockets where reactionary or right-wing elements have no specific hold.

We must work unswervingly to purge those vital positions within the state organizations where there are influential right-wing elements, and we must strengthen our control as regards the inviolability of the system and its principles within the party itself (8)."

Renegades, however, have many guises, the most recent of which they have borrowed from the need of various developing societies for technology and modernization. Several revolutions in the third world have gradually lost their hold and been replaced by bureaucrats and technocrats. Technology becomes a hidden secret, which the new high priests keep to themselves and use when required. Under the cover of technical accounts

of the applications of modern technology, the revolutionaries, because of their lack of knowledge, were always spreading the spurious secrets of the high priesthood, thus providing openings for counter-revolution.

However, Saddam Hussein realizes that there are those with good intentions and those with bad. "Many technicians, including Baathists, often find themselves dealing with the issue at stake from a technical point of view, and they forget the link between technical treatment and the general train of thought of the revolution, which is the way to build a new society (9)."

He does not hesitate to clearly state that which, in another time or place, would surely lead to the failure of any leader's experiments: "Here we say, and responsibly so, that you must not deal with major economic and technical questions without consulting the technical experts. But do not leave the task of economic leadership to them. Give them no opportunity to assume the role of leader. Instead, they must always work under the direction and leadership of the revolution, which has unlimited capacity and expert technical knowledge. It knows the revolution, understands the methods by which to alter society in general, and which direction the change should take, and uses every economic movement to serve itself and its aims (10)."

One might wonder, for instance, had matters been left to the conventionally minded technical experts when battle was being prepared to nationalize oil, would Iraq have been able to achieve its economic independence and begin to apply its ambitious projects for development? Technical experts have their own religion and revolutionaries have another. In the majority of cases, the revolutionaries are closer to God's heart for no other reason than that they always listen to the voice of the people!

Notes

- 1) Saddam Hussein, Hawla Iqamat al-Ishtirakiyya.
- 2) Ibid.
- 3) From the meeting between Saddam Hussein and Fidel Castro in Havana, December 1978.
- 4) Saddam Hussein, Unqulu Taqalid al-Hizb...
- 5) Ibid.
- 6) Ibid.
- 7) Ibid.
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) Ibid.
- 10) Ibid.